

News from Legislator Edward Rath



PROUDLY REPRESENTING DISTRICT 6
AKRON, AMHERST, CLARENCE & NEWSTEAD



Spring 2012

Towns, Villages would benefit greatly from Land Bank



Vacant buildings are an issue across Erie County and if created, the Land Bank would help municipalities deal with the issues associated with these structures.

The Erie County Legislature recently voted in favor of a joint application to form a Land Bank in Erie County, which would include all cities, towns and villages. The request is subject to approval by New York State.

Land Banking is a complex issue which addresses tax liens and vacant property. Its

mission is to invest in the community through the purchase of property and/or its tax liens, and take action to repurpose the buildings or the land.

"The goal is to get the property back on the tax roll. Through the plan created by the county, in partnership with the cities, towns and villages, every municipality stands to benefit," Legislator Rath said. "The focus of the Land Bank board must remain regional."

Funds in the Land Bank would be used to repair vacant properties to prepare them for resale or demolish structures that are beyond repair.

Not only is there a significant financial benefit, it will also address all the issues associated with vacant buildings. From being aesthetically unappealing, or producing safety concerns through failing structure, crime or rodent infestation, vacant buildings plague every village, town and city. No community is immune and all suffer loss revenue, which is coupled with the cost associated with dealing with the property.

There are more than 73,000 tax liens in Erie County, totaling more than \$53 million in taxes owed, and the City of Buffalo has only 11 percent of the assessed value of all liens.

Construction to continue through summer

Legislator Rath reminds motorists to be careful when traveling through road construction sites this summer. There are three major projects in his district that have begun and will continue for several months.

Construction in Amherst, on Maple Road at the

intersections of Flint, North Forest and Hopkins, a 2.7 mile stretch, is expected to conclude the end of September. The addition of right-turn lanes will reduce wait time and improve air quality in those areas.



Also under construction is the intersection of Greiner and Shimerville in Clarence. Work is expected to continue through July and will consist of drainage and road surface work, as well as the installation of a traffic signal.

John Street in the Village of Akron is also being

Special points of interest:

- COUNTY, NEWSTEAD CONSIDER LAND TRANSFER AT AKRON FALLS PARK.
- RESOLUTION SUPPORTS VOLUNTEER FIRE COMPANIES RECRUITMENT EFFORTS.
- FEDERAL LEADERS CALLED ON TO END UNFAIR 'FREE' CELL PHONE TAX.

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Akron Falls Park land transfer considered



The County considers transferring a portion of the park to the Town of Newstead.

Legislator Rath recently toured Akron Falls Park to discuss a land transfer from the County to the Town of Newstead. The proposal calls for 130 acres of land, located along Main Street, become property of the town.

“This would be a win-win situation. The County would no longer be responsible for maintenance of the parcel, while giving the town control of a great piece of property that is well utilized by the

community,” Legislator Rath said.

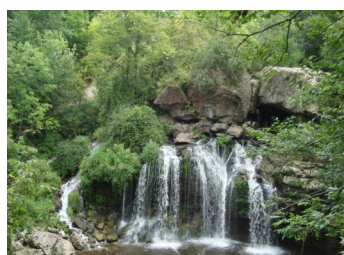
Currently the land is home to soccer fields and other recreational facilities.

Legislator Rath hopes the process will be concluded within the next few months, understanding there are several steps required when completing a land transfer.

This past August, the County announced the transfer of Beeman Creek Park, a

390-acre park, to the Town of Clarence. Through the acquisition, Clarence was able to review flooding issues in that area and the possibility of alleviating problems through the use of the land.

“The county has recently approved several land transfers that directly benefit the county and the municipality gaining ownership,” Legislator Rath added.



Take a guided walk through Akron Falls Park on Saturday, June 9.

Mark your calendars - Guided walks through County Parks

Erie County will once again hold its Guided Walks in County Parks Program. Registration begins at 9 a.m. and attendees are lead on a picturesque walk through the county's beautiful parks.

Walks will be held on the following days:

- May 19 - Chestnut Ridge
- June 2 - Como Lake
- June 9 - Akron Falls
- June 16 - Emery
- June 23 - Times Beach Nature Preserve
- June 30 - Sprague Brook

Information on how to get healthy and stay healthy will be available at each of the walks. Health screenings, including blood pressure and BMW readings will be conducted free of charge.

For information, contact the Parks at 858-7226 or visit www.erie.gov/parks.

Legislator Rath's resolution helps with firefighter recruitment

Legislator Rath sponsored a resolution in support of granting local volunteer firefighters reimbursement for tuition at Erie Community College. He recently became aware of an issue that prohibited Erie County volunteer firefighters from qualifying for a FASNY (Firemen's Association of the State of New York) grant, which was made available to volunteer firefighters across New York State in May 2011. The \$4.2 million grant allows

up to 80 credit hours at one of Erie Community College's three campuses.

“This is a great benefit for the community, fire departments, ECC and students. It allows our volunteer firefighters to utilize this grant that other counties across the state have available to them. I was pleased to sponsor a resolution in support of an immediate solution. I brought this resolution forward so we can ensure that Erie County's volunteers benefit from these



Legislator Rath addresses the Amherst Fire Council on April 23, 2012 about the steps taken to allow county firefighters access to a state grant to receive ECC tuition reimbursement.

grant dollars,” Legislator Rath said. “This will be a great program that fire

departments can highlight during their recruitment efforts.”

Valentines for Veterans generates hundreds of cards

Legislator Rath wishes to thank the students at St. Gregory the Great in Amherst and Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary School in Clarence for creating hundreds of cards for the Valentines for Veterans program. The cards were distributed to local veterans to thank them for their years of service.



Pictured from left to right around the table are president Tyler Will, Daniel Wilde, Michael Suchyna, Caitlin Conway and vice

president Benjamin Hartman. Standing are Legislator Rath

and Jennifer Kiss, the advisor for the Honor Society.



Legislator Rath calls for end of tax that pays for 'free' cell phones

Legislator Rath sponsored a resolution, "Calling on Congress to Repeal a Portion of the Universal Service Fund Act." It encourages members of Congress to introduce legislation to repeal the Universal Service Fund's. This fund enables telecommunications companies to tax users in order to fund "free" cellular phone devices to income

eligible consumers.

"To be compliant with an act that ensures all Americans have access to telecommunications networks and technology, companies must pay a tax to the FCC. In return, telecommunications companies tax citizens to pay for these free cell phones," Legislator Rath said. "That is not right. In addition, there is

no accountability for these free cell phones related to usage."

Legislator Rath added that the practice of providing free cell phones is a broken system and must be repealed.

The item was sent to the Legislature's Government Affairs Committee for further review.

LEGISLATOR RATH HAS CALLED ON CONGRESS TO REPEAL A PROGRAM THAT TAXES CITIZENS TO PAY FOR "FREE" CELL PHONES.

Business owners 'Thank a Vet' - How to get involved

Legislator Rath has partnered with County Clerk Christopher Jacobs to ask business owners to get involved in "Thank A Vet" as a way for our county to recognize the service and sacrifices made by our local veterans.

Under the "Thank A Vet" discount program, eligible veterans will receive a photo identification card obtained from the Erie County Clerk's Office that identifies them as an

honorably discharged veteran. Participating county merchants will agree to honor the card by providing holders with a discount on purchases or services. Involvement in the



program is beneficial to businesses that will undoubtedly realize increased traffic and sales. Each merchant's name, logo, address and discount particulars will be displayed on the Erie County's official website and each participating business will receive a decal to proudly show their support of our Erie County veterans. To view the online form for Erie County's "Thank A Vet" discount program, visit www.erie.gov/clerk.



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Watching the evening news I learned of the death of Jamey Rodemeyer. My heart went out to his family and I became more distraught as details were released about this senseless tragedy. While this specific incident hit closest to home, more cases of teen deaths related to bullying are being reported. In an effort to stop this from ever happening again in our county, I co-sponsored a resolution prohibiting cyber-bullying. It was approved in March of 2012 and I hope that the threat of ramifications will cause offenders to think about their actions and refrain from cyber-bullying. Should a situation rise to the level of criminal, we have a law on the books to deal with the situation and protect victims. Helping our most vulnerable residents is of the utmost importance and I was proud to see this law passed at the beginning of this term. If you have any questions about the County's Cyber-bullying law, or are interested in the Implementation Task Force, please contact my office.

Sincerely,

Ed Rath III

Proclamations presented to outstanding individuals, groups

At every session, the Erie County Legislature honors individual's and groups' accomplishments with proclamations. In January, February and March, the following recipients were recognized:

Amherst Center for Senior Services for 50 Years of dedicated service

Jordan Levy for his work with the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation

Clarence Chamber of Commerce's 2012 honorees: **Paul Stephen**, Citizen of the Year; **Casilio Companies**, Business of the



Mary Beth Dreyer, Public Health Educator for Upstate NY Regional Poison Center, was presented a proclamation recognizing the 50th anniversary of National Poison Prevention Week, March 18-24.

Year; **Clarence Community Pantry, Inc.**; and **Flora Leamer**, Lifetime Achiever.

Nominations accepted for Citizen of the Month award

Legislator Rath is accepting nominations for the Citizen of the Month Award. Created in January 2012 by the Legislature, the award honors an outstanding citizen from each of the 11 districts. Legislator Rath's honoree will be recognized in July.

"This is a great opportunity to recognize someone from the district that went above and beyond. I welcome all recommendations in an effort to find someone truly deserving of this title," Legislator Rath said.

To nominate someone for the honor, please call 858-8676 or email edward.rath@erie.gov.